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ABSTRACT

Results of a 1983 survey of Texas foreign language teachers reveal their views and concerns about a new state law requiring all prospective language teachers to pass an oral proficiency interview for certification beginning in 1986. Of the 142 respondents, most were Spanish teachers, high school teachers, and teachers with more than 10 years teaching experience but little or no foreign experience. It was found that most teachers knew of the proficiency testing requirement, but fewer knew of the oral interview tests, and a large majority wished extensive publicity about the implementation of testing. Specifically, teachers wanted a description of the tests and a list of the functions and notions covered. Teachers expected their teaching to be affected in a number of ways, including changing methods, curriculum, and materials; upgrading oral skills, offering more student opportunities for foreign experience; and requiring more support services. Teachers specified a few personal needs for: (1) more funds for foreign experience to develop skills; (2) new materials and individual inservice assistance with new methods; (3) communication about a broader range of topics and situations in the target language; and (4) smaller classes and updated aids. Desired services included information dissemination, language and methods training, travel programs, content courses, inservice, and curriculum development, with involvement of higher education in all these areas and state agency involvement in all but training professors and teachers. Teachers generally felt positively about the proficiency requirements. The 73-item questionnaire is included. (MSE)

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Proficiency Testing and the Teacher in the Field

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Beginning in 1986 all prospective teachers in Texas will be required to pass a proficiency test in their subject specialization in order to be certified to teach. The use of an oral interview test is planned for those specializing in the foreign languages. Teachers very likely will need to function at the 2/2+ (advanced) level. Presumably the institution of this type of testing procedure has major implications for high school and university personnel. A variety of questions come to mind. If oral proficiency is the major requirement for new teachers will it then also become the principal requirement at all levels for all language students of the future? What impact will this requirement have on how the profession views the skills of those teachers and professors already on the job and of those professionals who might like to re-enter the job market? How must programs and materials change in order to foster maximum development of oral communication skills? What could this emphasis on oral proficiency mean to business, government, and others who wish to hire the language-able? What needs to be done and who should do it in order to ensure that this change in our professional structure is accomplished efficiently and to the greatest benefit?

As Texas is among the first states to implement proficiency testing for teachers and among the first to implement so widespread an application of the oral interview test of language proficiency, Texas language professionals are among those who are identifying

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possible answers to these questions rather than among those who will have the benefit of others' experiences in establishing oral interview testing as they make their own implementation plans. Therefore the implementation of proficiency testing currently in Texas and elsewhere constitutes very important groundwork for the future. In order to do the task as well as it can be done, it is necessary to involve as many language professionals as possible, to pool all their awarenesses, needs and suggestions, so that the steps the profession takes are designed to account for as many eventualities

and to meet as many needs as possible. The survey covered here was intended to gather the input of as many language professionals as possible so that the resulting information can be disseminated to the appropriate agencies, organizations, and institutions to guide them as they establish this testing effort.

The views and concerns of teachers regarding the implications of the oral interview proficiency testing program provide insights that have not as yet been made available to those responsible for implementing proficiency testing.

From May to August 1983 the author disseminated a seventy-three item questionnaire to foreign languages teachers across Texas through the Texas Foreign Language Association Newsletter and through foreign language supervisors in the San Antonio, El Paso, Houston, and Dallas

areas. One hundred forty-two responses were received. Eighty percent of the respondents were Spanish teachers; the rest were divided among French, German, Latin, and others (Portuguese, E.S.L. and Italian). Two-thirds were high-school teachers, with the rest divided among college, middle-school, elementary junior college, and teacher education. Forty percent of the respondents had 1-10 years experience and sixty percent had 10 or more years experience. Forty percent had extensive foreign experience, sixty percent had moderate to none. Thus the sample was rather evenly divided between the slightly experienced and the experienced and between those with much foreign experience and those with little.

SECTION I

The first segment of the questionnaire dealt with awareness of the testing program. Seventy-three percent of the respondents had heard of the state's proficiency testing requirement but only sixty percent had heard of oral interview testing. Eighty-five percent felt that all language professionals needed extensive publicity about the implementation of testing. Some were also concerned about involving college professors (60 percent), businesses (30 percent), and professional organizations (60 percent). Overall, then, publicity was a concern but appeared to be progressing reasonably well at least among teachers already in professional organizations. However, teachers want a description of the tests and a listing of the functions and notions covered. Numerous questions were given about when specifics would be available.

SECTION II

The second segment of the questionnaire dealt with the perceived general impact of the testing program. An overwhelming majority of respondents felt that the new testing requirement would affect teachers already in high schools and colleges even though the requirement is not retroactive. They also saw it affecting teacher education and changing hiring practices relating to language teachers, both for new teachers and for those wishing to re-enter the job market or change jobs. Some reported that teachers are already being asked to present test scores when they apply for jobs regardless of when they obtained a certificate.

About sixty percent saw a need for some teachers and professors to upgrade oral skills. Forty percent felt that many teachers and professors would need the upgrading. Sixty and seventy percent predicted attendant changes in in-service offerings and in methods courses. Almost all respondents felt that many teachers and professors would need training in how to facilitate oral skills development. Sixty-two percent predicted changes in high school and college curricula and predicted greater needs for foreign experience for students and for different teaching materials.

An interesting item dealt with impact on business. Almost all respondents felt that the emphasis on oral proficiency would greatly benefit businesses wishing to hire language-able personnel.

Two-thirds of the respondents felt that they would need more and different services from the State Education Agency, but only half ex-

pected changes in services from colleges and universities. Still fewer (35 percent) expected to pass students from one course to another based on achievement level in oral proficiency.

In summary then, teachers expect their teaching to be affected in a number of ways. They expect to change methods, curriculum, and materials and to have to upgrade oral skills in many cases. They expect to have to offer more opportunities for foreign experience to students. They will need more and different support services. They do not see oral proficiency as a pass/fail determinant. Basically, then, they are saying that almost everything about their teaching will change. Thus there are some huge questions to consider about who will produce all these changes and what input there will be from individuals and organizations.

SECTION III

Section three covered teachers' personal needs and plans. Here it was evidently a case of predicting other people's need to change rather than their own for many respondents. Half the respondents checked no personal needs. The other half emphasized a few specifics: (1) They want to develop more oral proficiency but not necessarily through courses or in-service. They want more foreign experience to accomplish this and they want travel assistance funds. (2) They want new materials and in-service assistance with new methods, but they seem to plan to deal with the materials and in-service on an individual basis. Few indicated any intention to work on their school's program. They want help in changing but do not plan to participate

in general curricular revision, perhaps because of a perceived lack of personal expertise. (3) Most mentioned needing to be able to communicate about a broader range of topics and situations in the target language. (4) A number mentioned a need for smaller classes and updated aids (communication tapes instead of drill tapes, for example).

SECTION IV

Section four dealt with specific services desired from organizations, agencies, and institutions of higher learning. The services included dissemination of information, language and methods, training, travel programs, content courses, in-service, and curriculum development. The respondents that stitutions of higher learning needed to be involv in all these tasks, while state education agencies should be involved in all phases except retraining professors and offering special courses. They felt that appropriate professional organizations should be involved in all phases except training professors and teachers. They could disseminate information, establish travel programs, offer courses and in-service programs, and be involved in writing curricula. The great bulk of demand numerically appeared to be directed toward insitutions of higher learning, however.

SECTION V

The final section of the questionnaire was a brief set of completions designed to elicit a freer response to proficiency issues. Teachers felt positive about the proficiency emphasis because teaching and learning would be improved. They saw programs becoming more

credible. They were also concerned, however, about a number of items: expense, who would set standards, neglect of literacy, the role of Latin, the possible elevation of native speakers, the loss of oral proficiency after many years of teaching elementary courses, the neglect of testing teaching methodology for developing proficiency in the new certification testing, the ambiguity of pay related to proficiency (does a three get more than a two?), the ambiguous relationship of testing to student grouping (will we teach homogeneous groups?), etc.

Teachers want to improve oral proficiency and to have greater understanding of what the testing actually involves. They want to be further and better able to deal with the proficiency scene. They want to start testing their students and they want to be tested. In summary, then, they feel positive about oral proficiency even though they have one or more concerns about it. They want to deal with the tests and other related changes in methods, materials, and curriculum in greater detail, and they want to continue to receive information about developments in oral proficiency testing around the country as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though this data provides a start, there is far to go just to find out what people want and need. There are several thousand language personnel in Texas and undoubtedly many are not aware of the pending developments in proficiency testing and certification. This probability suggests that one important task for the teacher already

in the field is to continue this dialog, to tell others about the oral proficiency movement. The same situation undoubtedly exists in every state.

A second area for in-service teachers to concern themselves with is the range and the type of oral proficiency development they and their colleagues want: which functions, which notions, where, from whom, and with what kind of delivery system. A clear preference has been expressed for accomplishing this development by traveling, but obviously help will be needed if everyone is going to travel extensively. It will be necessary to begin to establish groups within districts or organizations who will find ways for this to happen. In addition, it will also be necessary to identify non-travel related ways to improve proficiency that interest language teachers and work on accessing those as well.

Related to all this it will also be necessary to find out in time what administrators plan in terms of hiring and tenuring practices related to oral proficiency requirements. A general sharing of ideas must take place. There must be interaction with nearby universities and with other institutions involved in foreign language teacher preparation in order to find out what they will be doing. Professional organizations also need to be informed of what teachers' needs and desires are.

Curriculum revisions, methods up-dates, new materials development, and in-service planning need to be considered also. They will all be areas of considerable change in the future. Teachers need to

be thinking about what they want to have happen in these areas and to be ready at the right time to start interacting or volunteering with the groups that will rewrite curriculum and materials and will plan in-service sessions.

At some point teachers also will be the interpreters of these developments to parents, students, businesses, educators in other fields and the public at large. They have to be informed about what each of these groups need or wants to know so that they are ready to interact with each one. In summary, the significant involvement for teachers as well as for agencies, organizations, and universities, is in identifying answers to some of the important concerns that have been raised:

--Having input in setting standards for level of oral proficiency

--The balance between oral skills and literacy skills

--The roles of teachers who are native speakers and of those who are non-native speakers of the target languages

--The long term maintenance and/or improvement of oral proficiency

--The teacher's pedagogical skills in a second language versus the teacher's oral proficiency as a criterion for certification

--The relation of pay to proficiency

--The relationship of test results to classroom grouping

--Development and dissemination of new curricula

--Development and dissemination of new techniques

--Development and dissemination of information about proficiency testing

--Relation of teaching for proficiency to class size

--Development of access to training and travel and dissemination of related information

Finally, and perhaps most immediately, especially in areas where proficiency testing is being implemented, teachers must examine immediately the advantages and difficulties in the proficiency movement and the most immediate questions and needs. Then these views must be communicated to state organizations, state agencies and to proficiency testers themselves. Dialog involving teachers must be established at the national level. Since proficiency will be a major concern for a long time, it is important that the job be well done. Language professionals have the opportunity of exercising a most important leadership role for this era and it is incumbent that they succeed.

TEACHER VIEWS AND CONCERNS REGARDING THE IMPLICATIONS
OF THE ORAL INTERVIEW TESTING PROGRAM

CHECK THE ITEMS THAT APPLY TO YOU OR EXPRESS YOUR OPINION.

I. Respondent characteristics

A. Language
15% French
80% Spanish
3% German
1% Latin
1% Other _____

B. Position
67% High School language
3% College language
___ College literature
___ Supervisor
10% Teacher educator
10% Other _____

C. Years in Profession
40% 1-5, 5-10
60% 10-20, Over 20

D. Region of State
___ North
___ South
___ East
___ West
___ Central
unclear responses

E. Formal Education
35% Bachelor's
50% Master's
10% Ph.D.
___ Non-degree graduate work

F. Foreign Experience
40% Extensive
60% Moderate, Little, None

G. Other relevant dimensions: _____

II. Awareness of the Testing Program

73% 1. I have heard about required testing for certification before.
60% 2. I have heard about oral interview testing before.
30% 3. College professors who will test should receive extensive publicity about procedures for implementing the process.
85% 4. All language professionals need extensive publicity about how the process will be implemented.
30% 5. Businesses and agencies need extensive publicity about these procedures and expected programmatic changes.
60% 6. Professional language organizations need extensive publicity about how the process will be implemented.
___ 7. Other _____

III. General Impact of the Testing Program

96% 1. This certification procedure will ultimately affect teachers already in the public schools.
96% 2. This certification procedure will ultimately affect language teachers in the colleges.
94% 3. This certification procedure will ultimately affect literature/culture teachers in the colleges.
96% 4. This certification procedure will ultimately affect language teacher educators.
94% 5. This certification procedure will affect hiring practices relating to language teachers.
96% 6. This certification procedure will affect former language teachers wishing to re-enter the job market for teachers.
60% 7. This certification procedure will affect in-service offerings/needs.

AN OPEN LETTER TO TEXAS FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

As many of you know, beginning in 1986 all prospective teachers in Texas will have to pass a proficiency test in their subject specialization in order to be certified to teach. Use of an oral interview test is planned for the foreign languages. Teachers will probably have to function at the 2/2+(advanced) level. Presumably the institution of this type of testing procedure has major implications for high school and university programs and for high school and university personnel. All sorts of questions come to mind. If oral proficiency is the major requirement for new teachers is it then also the main requirement at all levels for all language students of the future? What impact will this requirement have on how the profession views the skills of those teachers and professors already on the job and of those professionals who might like to re-enter the job market? How must programs and materials change in order to foster maximum development of oral communication skills? What could this emphasis on oral proficiency mean to business, government, and others who wish to hire the language-able? What needs to be done and who should do it in order to ensure that this change in our professional structure is accomplished efficiently and to greatest benefit?

As Texas is among the first states to implement proficiency testing for teachers and among the first to implement so widespread an application of the oral interview test of language proficiency, we language professionals are among those who are forging the answers to these questions rather than among those who will have the benefit of others' experiences in establishing oral interview testing as they make their own implementation plans. Therefore, the groundwork we lay is most important - both for us and for those who will follow us in this endeavor. In order to do our task as well as it can be done, we need to involve as many of us as possible, to pool all our awarenesses, needs, and suggestions, so that the steps the profession takes in this state are designed to account for as many eventualities and to meet as many needs as possible. The following survey is intended to gather the input of as many language professionals as possible so that the resulting information can be disseminated to the appropriate agencies, organizations, and institutions to guide them as they establish this testing effort. You are asked to help in the realization of this task by filling out this form and returning it as soon as possible to Dr. Barbara Gonzalez, Division of Foreign Languages, University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas 78285.

60% 8. Some teachers will need to upgrade oral skills.
40% 9. Many teachers will need to upgrade their oral skills.
60%10. Some professors will need to upgrade their oral skills.
40%11. Many professors will need to upgrade their oral skills.
70%12. Methods courses will have to change to prepare teachers who can facilitate extensive oral skills development.
4%13. Some teachers will need training in order to be able to facilitate extensive oral skills development.
96%14. Many teachers will need training in order to be able to facilitate extensive oral skills development.
4%15. Some professors will need training in order to be able to facilitate extensive oral skills development.
96%16. Many professors will need training in order to be able to facilitate extensive oral skills development.
62%17. High school curricula will have to change to facilitate extensive oral skills development.
62%18. College curricula will have to change to facilitate extensive oral skills development.
62%19. Students will need more foreign experience to facilitate extensive oral skills development.
62%20. We will need different materials in order to facilitate extensive oral skills development.
96%21. Such program changes would ultimately benefit those businesses, agencies, and schools who wish to hire language-able personnel.
67%22. Such program changes would affect services teachers would need from their professional organizations.
67%23. Such program changes would affect services teachers would need from the Texas Education Agency.
50%24. Such program changes would affect services teachers would need from colleges.
50%25. Such program changes may mean that language majors who are not going to teach will also succeed in college according to their oral proficiency.
35%26. Such program changes may mean that college language students may ultimately pass from one course to another based on their oral proficiency.
35%27. Such program changes may mean that high school language students may ultimately pass from one course to another based on their oral proficiency.
28. Other _____

_____

IV. Personal Needs and Plans

38% 1. I had extensive formal opportunities to develop oral proficiency.
42% 2. I had extensive foreign experiences to develop oral proficiency.
52% 3. I need more opportunity to develop greater oral proficiency.
36% 4. I want in-service to help me develop greater oral proficiency.
36% 5. I want special courses to help me develop greater oral proficiency.
52% 6. I want more foreign experience to help me develop greater oral proficiency.
52% 7. I need scholarships for this purpose.
52% 8. I need travel assistance funds.
32% 9. I plan to get such special coursework within 5 years.
18%10. I plan to help modify my school's program.
52%11. I plan to seek new materials.
48%12. I plan to modify my teaching approach.
48%13. I plan to attend in-services if offered.
42%14. I plan to get such foreign experience within 5 years
48%15. I need to be able to communicate about a much wider range of topics and situations.

48% 16. I need more skills to interact smoothly and achieve my desired effects in my target language.
___17. Other _____

_____

V. Roles for Organizations, Agencies and Institutions (put any combination of O, A, or I in each blank).
Majority listed O, A, and I for most items.
___ 1. Disseminate information
___ 2. Train university professors as testers of oral proficiency.
___ 3. Train public school teachers to assess student oral proficiency.
___ 4. Train teachers to develop oral proficiency in students.
___ 5. Establish travel programs.
___ 6. Offer special courses.
___ 7. Offer in-service.
___ 8. Train professors to develop oral proficiency in students.
___ 9. Rewrite curricula for language programs.
___10. Rewrite curricula for language teacher education.
___11. Other _____

_____

VI. Summary (Complete the statements)

1. I am pleased about oral proficiency testing because _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. I am concerned about oral proficiency testing because _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. I want to learn _____

_____

_____

_____

4. I want to be informed about _____

_____

_____

5. Other _____

_____